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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 000810

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [PINR](#) [KPKO](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [BO](#)
SUBJECT: BOLIVIAN MILITARY: LATEST THINKING

REF: A. LA PAZ 706

- [1](#)B. LA PAZ 432
- [1](#)C. LA PAZ 428
- [1](#)D. LA PAZ 373
- [1](#)E. LA PAZ 218

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: President Evo Morales continues to demand an apology from SouthCom Commander Admiral James Stavridis for allegedly implying Morales has links to terrorism, according to Armed Forces Commander Luis Trigo Antelo. Trigo told our MILGP Commander that without a formal written apology there would be no progress on an exchange of dipnotes required to send temporary-duty military to Bolivia, effectively freezing many of MILGP's humanitarian assistance projects. Our contacts assure us the suspension of the dipnote exchange is coming from the Presidential Palace, most likely directly from Minister of the Presidency Juan Ramon Quintana. As discussed by the Ambassador and Admiral Stavridis, we advise not responding to this request, as the complaint has already been addressed by dipnote and in high-level meetings, and would only empower Quintana. Separately Trigo said high-level visits and training for uniformed military would be put on hiatus, but that all other exchanges, technical training, and military cooperation would continue. Trigo also conveyed fears for his life, following a bizarre April 3 "assassination attempt," and implied he suspected the opposition or opposition-sympathetic actors might have something to do with it. Morales and administration officers have distanced themselves from use of the military to quash the May 4 autonomy referendum in Santa Cruz Department (state), but have instead enlisted social groups to play interference. End Summary.

Evo to Stavridis: Say You're Sorry

[1](#)2. (C) Armed Forces Commander Luis Trigo Antelo told MILGP Commander April 8 that President Evo Morales wants a written apology from SouthCom Commander Admiral James Stavridis for allegedly implying Morales was a "narco-terrorist" during a January 17 presentation. Trigo said an of exchange

diplomatic notes with the United States allowing U.S. military personnel rights and privileges in Bolivia roughly equivalent to a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) would be forthcoming following such an apology. Trigo explained the apology should be submitted to Trigo, who would deliver it to Morales.

Trigo/Vargas Outline Near Term Military Relations

13. (C) Trigo further laid out his interpretations of the government's new agenda regarding U.S. Military assistance: --The ban on Bolivian military attended WHINSEC (Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) will stand for the near-term, although he added it could be reconsidered pending an apology from Admiral Stavridis. --Senior military leaders would pass on training and conference opportunities, including Distinguished Visitor programs. Although he did not define what he meant by senior, and we suspect he may be speaking only for himself, he implied this would include all high-command officers, effectively canceling planned U.S. trips for Army Commander Freddy Mackay (June) and Air Force Commander Daniel Salazar and Trigo (July). This travel ban would not/not impact the MOD and a planned mid-May visit by Vice Minister of Defense Wilfredo Vargas would continue, as will trips by other high-ranking MOD officials, such as MOD's senior civilian advisor. --Participation in all other U.S. technical training, conferences, and exchanges would continue.

14. (C) VMOD Vargas told MILGP April 4 that his efforts led to the military finally nominating officers for several U.S. training and conference slots. He said he was also successful in advocating for an increased role for Bolivian peacekeeping troops participating in UN missions and approval of a separate dipnote exchange to facilitate U.S. funding of Bolivian peacekeeping efforts. Vargas lamented he did not succeed in pushing for the dipnote SOFA or securing access passes to the Joint Command facilities. Although the passes were routinely distributed to U.S. officers in prior years by unofficially asking for them, we asked to receive them through official channels this year and have been denied. Nevertheless, access to BolMil installations remains excellent.

All Signs Point to Quintana

15. (C) Trigo said he did not agree with the request for an apology, nor did the MOD or uniformed command, who would rather see the dipnote move forward expeditiously, but that the "political" decision to require an apology had come from the Presidential Palace. Trigo said he would discuss the matter directly with Stavridis during a May 15-17 Southern Cone Chiefs of Defense Conference in Brasilia (SCONDEC). A variety of military and civilian contacts confirm there is no resistance to the dipnote SOFA agreement on substantive grounds from either the MOD or MFA, but that the agreement has been held up for political reasons by Morales' inner circle (refs a and b). Vice Minister of Defense Wilfredo Vargas told MILGP Commander and PolOff February 26 that Presidential Minister (Chief of Staff) Juan Ramon Quintana was behind the holdup. During a meeting with Codel Engel February 19, Morales complained about SouthCom Commander's presentations and said, with Quintana at his side, that Quintana would take care of it (ref d).

16. (C) Toni Condori, Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies' (lower house) Defense Committee, told PolOff April 4 that he had convoked the MFA to report on the delay weeks ago, but that the MFA had not yet responded due to a busy schedule of incoming diplomatic missions. He did not think the delay was an intentional slight, but plans to push for an expedited exchange because "we are concerned about losing opportunities." Condori (ruling MAS party) said he understood that the holdup could send a negative signal to Washington that could affect the budgets for military

training and assistance for 2009. Still, Condori conceded that if the holdup is from the Presidential Palace, as he suspects, "there is not much I can do to move it along." Fernando Romero, Chairman of the Senate Defense Committee, likewise told PolOff in late March that he too had asked for an MFA report on the dipnote, but that if he does not receive assurances the dipnote was moving forward he was inclined to complain publicly about the "absurd rejection of help we need." MFA Director for Bilateral Affairs Jean Paul Guevara told PolOff April 4 that he had confirmed that the Presidential Palace had no issue with the agreement's merit or text and he would "try again to find a way forward we can all agree on."

Dipnote SOFA Background

17. (C) Without an exchange of diplomatic notes before April 15, SouthCom has indicated U.S. MILGP medical missions to Bolivia will be canceled for 2008. The dipnote exchange covers U.S. military personal on temporary duty in Bolivia. Without it, all U.S. MILGP humanitarian assistance projects requiring TDY personnel are in danger. In light of the current political atmosphere in Bolivia, the Ambassador is not inclined to provide country clearances for such personal without the protections guaranteed in the dipnote due to the absence of a SOFA. The dipnote SOFA exchange has been in practice since the mid-90s and must be renewed annually.

18. (C) We presented dipnote 011-08 initiating the process January 16. The government's reply was dipnote VREC-015/2008-1225 (text in ref e), dated January 29, which suspended the exchange of dipnotes pending the bridging of "a significant gap in our understanding." The gap referred to Admiral Stavridis' January 17 presentation to CSIS, which included a slide with a photograph of Morales with Iranian President Ahmadinejad. The Bolivian government has alleged the photo implies Evo is a narco-terrorist, a charge we have refuted repeatedly, including via dipnote 034/08 and in conversations with Vice-President Alvaro Garcia Linera and Minister of Defense Walker San Miguel (refs b and e). The Ambassador explained to both Garcia Linera and San Miguel that the PowerPoint slide in question used the photo only to illustrate Iran's interest in Latin America, and there was no intent to suggest Morales was a narco-terrorist nor was there any mention whatsoever of Morales or Bolivia.

Trigo's Strange Behavior Belies Fears of the U.S.

19. (C) Trigo also told MILGP Commander he feared a follow-on to the April 3 attempt on his life by a lone, crazed youth. He gave no details on the investigation, but was noticeably uncomfortable with MILGP Commander and said he had not determined whether the gunman acted alone or as part of a larger conspiracy backed by the opposition or opposition-sympathetic actors. MILGP Commander reiterated to Trigo that MILGP is solely concerned with maintaining positive military relations and cooperative programs. After two months of trying to obtain a meeting with Gen. Trigo, his deputy (Gen. Prudencio) pulled MILGP Commander into Trigo's office to cover agenda topics that he felt only Trigo could address. Trigo has since told MILGP Commander he has an open-door and MILGP Commander can visit him anytime he likes.

(Comment: Trigo's strange combination of unease and friendly engagement with MILGP Commander comes after Trigo called Defense Attache to his residence about a half-an-hour after the aborted attack occurred. Trigo spent two hours with Defense Attache recounting the episode. We suspect Trigo is trying to ingratiate himself with the Embassy. End Comment.)

110. (U) According to local media, Yovanni Joel Guillen entered Trigo's residence at 5:30 PM April 3. Guillen slipped in with a group visiting Trigo's wife and was subsequently apprehended with a 22 caliber rifle in his pant leg. The mentally unstable 21-year-old reportedly planned the attack against Trigo because he suspected he was planning a coup against President Morales, but at the last minute

changed his mind.

Evo: Social Groups, not Military, mobilized for May 4

¶11. (C) Trigo also told Defense Attache he is lobbying Morales to back off from a hard-line response to Santa Cruz Department's (state) May 4 autonomy referendum and that any use of security forces should be confined to the Bolivian National Police. MOD San Miguel publicly said opposition warnings of a May 4 crackdown are "irresponsible and ridiculous" and President Morales issued a statement April 7 denying any plans to for a state of siege on Santa Cruz to prevent the referendum. Morales and Vice President Garcia Linera said April 5 that the referendum would be met with social groups, not the military. Morales assured April 9 that the military is in "complete unity" with the government, despite efforts by "some people" to divide the institution. As proof, Morales cited his weekly meetings with the military's high command and his talks with regional commanders when he visits departments. The comments were in response to an April 7 article in leading daily La Razon in which anonymous military officers allegedly said they would not use force against Bolivians to resolve the internal political conflict, urged Morales to seek a peaceful resolution of the government/opposition standoff, and complained that some senior commanders are disposed to obey Morales' orders blindly.

Comment:

¶12. (C) We already fully explained our version of events in dipnote 034/08. We will continue coordinating our MILGP programs through working-level contacts, but believe any response to this absurd request for an apology is both inappropriate and ill-advised, as it will undoubtedly be used against us as "proof" of our nefarious intent to undermine and discredit the Morales administration. Quintana is deliberately using the Stavridis comments as an excuse to block U.S.-Bolivian military cooperation. Providing an apology, or any response, would only empower Quintana. Any attempt to convince Morales to accept our help should come from his own MOD and MFA, not the United States. MILGP commander's active-duty contacts tell him they would lose significant confidence in the high command should they proceed with any further restrictions on U.S. cooperation, especially exercises, training, and seminars. Our message to Trigo should be that no apology is forthcoming and to reference him to our dipnote. End Comment.

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